

## The Blame Game [OR What Does “Queer Eye” Have Do with the Church?]

Genesis 3:8-15 and Mark 3:20-35

Pastor Caitlin Trussell with Augustana Lutheran Church on June 6, 2021

Ah, the Blame Game. It's a tale as old as Adam and Eve's tragic story of trading the Garden of Eden for the lie that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil then they could be "like God."<sup>1</sup> They were both present for the tempter's invitation. They both ate the fruit. They both suddenly realized that they were naked and covered themselves with fig leaves. Given the simultaneous sin for both, it's curious that the history of interpretation shouldered Eve with a singular burden as if Adam's culpability were incidental. I highly recommend reading the opening verses of Genesis chapter 3 that lead into our story today. I do not think they mean what we think they mean based on what most of us have in our heads about Eve. History scapegoated her as THE Temptress with arguments that are frankly unobservant, misogynistic, and sexist.

Eve's scapegoating comes in part from Adam's blame of her when God looks for them in the garden. Biblical interpreters responded to Adam's blame of Eve and said, "Ye-ah, ye-ah, that's the ticket... Adam would have been just fine if it weren't for Eve." What's followed is millennia of Blame Game against women – their actions, their motivations, and their role as scapegoats used against them for someone else's gain.

This is not to say that Eve is off the hook. She caved to temptation. And while Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent and they all ended up suffering for it.<sup>2</sup> He's a blamer – she's a blamer – wouldn't you say that you're a blamer too?<sup>3</sup> After all, their story is our story. Their story is an attempt to understand something about the origin of suffering and a broken creation. Their story also includes all too familiar themes of superiority and scapegoating as certain people are blamed as the problem by other people who blame them as the bigger sinners. The ultimate, go-to stunt when you're trying to win the Blame Game is to tell someone that they're of the devil. And that's precisely what we encounter in our return to the Gospel of Mark today after spending the Easter season in the Gospel of John.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:5

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:14-19 This is a few extra verses after our reading today.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvCTaccEkMI>

Quick refresher. Mark is EXTREMELY interested in Jesus' proclamation of God's good news. In the first chapter of Mark, Jesus proclaims that, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."<sup>4</sup> Jesus being at the center of this good news is assumed, announced, and reinforced by the gospel writer. So far in Mark, up to our story today, the demons are the only ones who have correctly identified Jesus.<sup>5</sup> But knowledge *about* Jesus is quite different than faith, trust, and hope *in* Jesus. Okay, refresher over – on to the story!

Jesus had just appointed his twelve apostles including "Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him," and "then he went home." Jesus' mother, brothers, and sisters worry that he's out of his mind and try to keep him home. The Jerusalem scribes, who are likely temple-based religious leaders, show up in Nazareth and accuse him of the demonic.<sup>6</sup> Jesus embarrasses the scribes and redefines family, dangerous actions at that time in Judea and partly why he ends up killed.<sup>7</sup> He flips the attack from the scribes, telling them that they judged God's good news as evil when they accused him being possessed by an unclean spirit.<sup>8</sup> Why does any of this matter? It matters because calling God's good news evil happens all the time. In this regard, the church has much to confess and apologize for our part in the Blame Game.

A recent example of the church's need to confess and apologize can be found in season five of *Queer Eye*.<sup>9</sup> *Queer Eye* is a television show that identifies a worthy "hero" and updates their home, wardrobe, and style, along with enriching their mental and physical health. In said episode, Pastor Noah Hepler of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Atonement was nominated by his Congregation Council to be helped by *Queer Eye*'s Fab 5. He's an ELCA pastor who is gay. He attended seminary and came out later in his life. Noah talked about the pain he experienced as a closeted, gay teenager in a church that preached about homosexuality as a sin. He also preached an amazing sermon at the end of the

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 1:14-15

<sup>5</sup> Mark 1:23-24

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Skinner, Professor of New Testament, Luther Seminary, MN. Podcast: Mark 3:20-35 for Sermon Brainwave for June 6, 2021. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/787-second-sunday-after-pentecost-ord-10b-june-6-2021>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Mark 3:30

<sup>9</sup> The highlighted episode can be watched on Netflix. Living Lutheran published an interview with Pastor Noah Hepler here: <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2020/06/how-noah-hepler-found-reawakening-in-queer-eye/>

episode during his congregation's 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary; Noah celebrated who God created him to be as a gay man and he apologized on behalf of the church who have hurt so many people based on gender and sexuality.

Remember Adam and Eve at the beginning of the sermon? Those two served as handy poster children for historical interpretations that did not serve women. They also have millennia of historical burden placed on their shoulders for what love should look like. This burden continues to lead to the scapegoating, abuse, and murder of queer folks that we sometimes describe with the catchall acronym of LGBTQIA+ which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual/Aromantic/or Agender.<sup>10</sup> So much of our culture, including church culture, has tilted in favor of heterosexual norms that it makes it difficult to see how much pain it's produced unless you have a queer friend or family member, or you yourself are queer.

In point of fact, this may be the first time you've ever heard these words used positively in church, not to mention the idea that we can celebrate all of who God created someone to be, including their gender and sexuality. You know how many times Jesus talked about anything related to being queer or gay? Zero. Just for kicks this week, look up how many times he talked it this week and then look up how many times he talked about money, poverty, hunger, or love. The other few Bible verses that have been interpreted as against homosexual behavior are more likely warning against abuse and idolatry. One sermon is not going to cover all this content down to the last thought but it's part of a conversation. A conversation that we're willing and want to have. Let me know if you'd like to talk more about it.

The ultimate good news is that each one of us, each one of you, are beloved by God. There is nothing you can do or not do to make God love you any more or any less. The more we embrace that good news for ourselves, the more we can embrace that good news for other people. We complicate life and hurt ourselves and others when we create artificial boundaries as if they were set by God and when we judge things as evil that God calls good. This is especially troubling when Jesus himself commands us first to love God and second to love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>11</sup> Jesus risked everything, even his own life, to love and to announce

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<sup>10</sup> LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersexual, Asexual/Aromantic/Agender  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/LGBTQIA>

<sup>11</sup> Mark 12:28-34

God's love to ever expanding groups of people. For crying out loud, the church exists today because of Jesus' love and inclusion of non-Jews. As the church, the body of Christ, we would do well to risk love over anything else, too. Blaming and scapegoating were nailed to the cross with Jesus who was the ultimate and final scapegoat. We don't have to play the Blame Game anymore because the need for it was swallowed up in Christ's victory over death. Christ's death and resurrection brings freedom, light, life, and healing through forgiveness into the world's brokenness, binding us to God and each other through self-sacrificing love that risked everything. Thanks be to God! And amen.